



Preschool Children's Self-Concepts and Academic Achievement: Preliminary Findings

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BACKGROUND

During early childhood, children begin to develop an understanding of their attributes, abilities, and values. This sense of who they are characterizes their developing self-concepts. Children's self-concepts become increasingly differentiated and multidimensional over time. More specifically, children's self-concepts can be subdivided into three domains: cognitive, social, and physical (Burnett, 1994; Harter, 1992; Marsh, et al., 2002). Children's self-concepts have important developmental and educational implications. First, it is likely that children's self-concepts are related to their overall feelings of self-worth. Second, children's self-concepts may also be related to academic achievement and motivation. Given the potential impact of self-concept on children's development and educational outcomes, it is important to examine this construct.

Although extensive research has examined the self-concepts of children in elementary, middle, and high school, little is known about the self-concepts of younger children. The current study examines preschool children's self-concepts, and explores the relationship between self-concept and academic achievement.

METHOD

Participants

The current sample included 48 children (30 males) between the ages of 3,0 and 5,7 ($M = 4.5$). Eight additional children participated in the study but did not complete all of the tasks because of fatigue and/or misunderstanding of questions or scale usage.

Materials

Children's self-concepts were measured using two separate self-concept measures:

- Joseph Picture Self-Concept Scale (Joseph, 2004)
 - Children were shown 21 pairs of illustrations representing common self-appraisal situations and were asked to choose between a picture representing a positive self-concept and another representing a negative self-concept.
- Marsh Self-Description Questionnaire for Preschoolers (SDQP; Marsh, 2002)
 - Children were asked to respond to 18 questions using a 3-point Likert-scale (1 = "no," 2 = "yes sometimes," and 3 = "yes always"). The 18 items were subdivided into 6 subscales: physical ability, physical appearance, peer relations, parent relations, verbal ability, and math ability.

Children's academic achievement was measured using the Numbers, Letters, and Words subtest of the Kaufman Survey of Early Academic and Language Skills (K-SEALS; Kaufman & Kaufman, 1993). This subtest included a total of 40 items: 20 that assessed number skills and 20 that assessed pre-reading and reading skills.

Procedure

- Children were recruited from two local childcare centers.
- For each child, all of the measures were administered individually in a quiet room within the childcare center.
- Each testing session began by explaining the nature of the tasks and then assuring each child of the confidentiality of his/her responses. Upon receiving each child's verbal assent, the child was asked to draw a picture of him/herself. This established rapport and increased the child's comfort level.
- The order of tasks was counterbalanced, with half of the children completing the Joseph Scale first and the other half completing the SDQP first. The K-SEALS was completed in between the two self-concept measures. A fourth task, an interest inventory, was completed last.
- The majority of children completed the 4 tasks within 25 minutes.
- Children were given stickers as a token of appreciation.

SELECTED REFERENCES

- Burnett, P. C. (1994). Self-concept and self-esteem in elementary school children. *Psychology in the Schools, 31*, 164-171.
- Harter, S. (1982). The perceived competence scale for children. *Child Development, 53*, 87-97.
- Marsh, H. W., Ellis, L. A., and Craven, R. G. (2002). How do preschool children feel about themselves? Unraveling measurement and multidimensional self-concept structure. *Developmental Psychology, 38*, 376-393.

MEASURES

Sample KSEALS Items

20	m y p k s h
"What number is this?"	"Show me the letter s."

Sample SDQP Items

Can you run a long way without stopping?
Do you like the way you look?
Do you have lots of friends?
Do your parents like you?
Do you know lots of different words?
Are you good at counting?

Sample Joseph Scale Item

One of these girls is a slow runner and the other one can run very fast. Which one is most like you?

RESULTS

Girls' and Boys' Joseph Scale Composite Scores

Girls (n = 18)		Boys (n = 30)	
M	SD	M	SD
52.6	7.88	50.5	9.10*

*p = ns.

Girls' and Boys' SDQP Composite Scores

Girls (n = 18)		Boys (n = 29)	
M	SD	M	SD
42.8	6.56	43.3	6.11*

*p = ns.

Girls' and Boys' K-SEALS Scores

Girls (n = 18)		Boys (n = 30)	
M	SD	M	SD
112.78	14.24	112.27	15.12*

*p = ns.

RESULTS

Bivariate Correlations Between the Joseph Scale and the SDQP

	Joseph Scale
Girls' SDQ-P	-.30
Boys SDQ-P	.48*

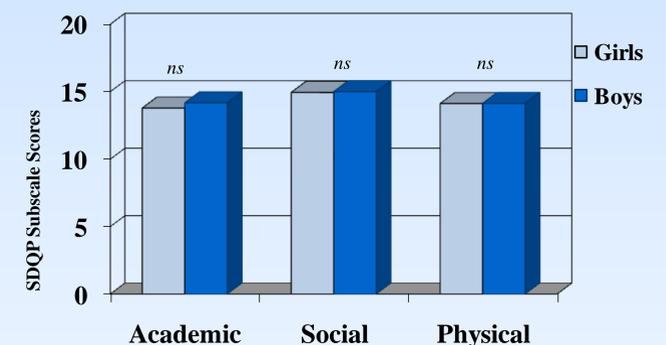
*p = .01.

Bivariate Correlations Between Academic Self-Concept and Academic Achievement

	Academic Self-Concept
Girls' K-SEALS	.68*
Boys K-SEALS	-.07

*p = .00.

Girls' and Boys' SDQP Subscale Scores



CONCLUSIONS

- There were no sex differences in children's self-concepts scores. Both girls and boys displayed similar levels of self-concept on both the SDQP and Joseph Scale. The vast majority of children displayed positive self-concepts.
- There were no sex differences on the subscales (academic, social, and physical) of the SDQP. This contradicts prior research which has found stereotypic sex differences in various domains of self-concept (i.e., boys typically reporting higher physical self-concepts than girls).
- There were also no sex differences in academic achievement scores.
- Boys' scores on the SDQP were positively related to their scores on the Joseph scale, whereas girls' scores on these two scales were not related to each other. Further, there was no significant relationship between the two scales when the data was collapsed across boys and girls. This leads us to question the validity of the measures and whether or not they were accurate measures of preschool children's self-concepts.
- Girls' scores on the academic self-concept subscale of the SDQP were positively related to their academic achievement scores, but boys' academic self-concept and achievement scores were not significantly related to each other.
- This study warrants further research into children's self-concepts as well as the relationships between their self-concepts and achievement. More specifically, the measurements/methodology used to assess young children's self-concepts need to be examined.